

How Can Violence Be Prevented?

Using a public health approach to develop prevention initiatives provides the opportunity to address violence from a different perspective, that is moving from an individual approach to a population approach. The first two steps of the public health model provide important information about the scope of the problem and populations to be reached. Risk and protective factors are those variables that can be addressed to diminish the risk of sexual violence. Putting this knowledge into practice is a central goal of public health.

Types Of Prevention

Public health interventions are traditionally characterized in terms of three levels of prevention:

- Primary prevention- approaches that aim to prevent violence before it occurs.
- Secondary prevention- approaches that focus on the more immediate responses to violence, such as pre-hospital care, emergency services or treatment for sexually transmitted diseases following a rape.
- Tertiary prevention-approaches that focus on long-term care in the wake of violence such as revictimization, rehabilitation and reintegration, and attempts to lessen trauma or reduce the long-term disability associated with violence.

These three levels of prevention are defined by their temporal aspect—whether prevention takes place before violence occurs, immediately afterwards or over the longer term. Although traditionally they are applied to victims of violence and within health care settings, secondary and tertiary prevention efforts have also been regarded as having relevance to the perpetrators of violence, and applied in judicial setting in response to violence.

Researchers in the field of violence prevention have increasingly turned to a definition of prevention that focuses on the target group of interest. This definition categorizes interventions as:

- **Universal interventions** - approaches aimed at groups or the general population without regard to individual risk; examples include violence prevention curricula delivered to all students in a school or children of a particular age and community-wide media campaigns.
- **Selected interventions**—approaches aimed at those considered at heightened risk for violence having one or more risk factors for violence); an example of such an intervention is training in parenting provided to low-income, single parents.
- **Indicated interventions** - approaches aimed at those who have already demonstrated violent behavior, such as treatment for perpetrators of domestic violence.

Multifaceted Responses

Because violence is a multifaceted problem with biological, psychological, social, and environmental roots, it needs to be confronted on several different levels at once. The ecological models serve a dual purpose in this regard: each level in the model represents a level of risk and each level can also be thought of as a key point for intervention.

Dealing with violence on a range of levels involves addressing all of the following:

- Addressing individual risk factors and taking steps to modify individual risk behaviors.
- Influencing close personal relationships and working to create healthy family environments, as well as providing professional help and support for dysfunctional families.
- Monitoring public places such as schools, workplaces and neighborhoods and taking steps to address problems that might lead to violence.

- Addressing the larger cultural, social and economic factors that contribute to violence and taking steps to change them, including measures to close the gap between the rich and poor and to ensure equitable access to goods, services, and opportunities.

A Comprehensive Response

Many efforts to date, in both industrialized and developing countries, have focused on secondary and tertiary responses to violence. Understandably, priority is often given to dealing with the immediate consequences of violence, providing support to victims and punishing the offenders. Such responses, while important should also be accompanied by an investment in primary prevention. A comprehensive response to violence is one that not only protects and supports victims of violence, but also promotes non-violence, reduces the perpetration of violence, and changes the circumstances and conditions that give rise to violence in the first place.